

Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11) **EP 0 689 326 A3**

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(88) Date of publication A3:
22.08.2001 Bulletin 2001/34

(51) Int Cl.7: **H04L 29/06**

(43) Date of publication A2:
27.12.1995 Bulletin 1995/52

(21) Application number: **95304261.1**

(22) Date of filing: **20.06.1995**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
DE FR GB

• **Schaffer, Russel W.**
Ocean Grove, NJ 07756 (US)

(30) Priority: **21.06.1994 US 263092**

(74) Representative: **Cleary, Fidelma et al**
International IP Department
NCR Limited
206 Marylebone Road
London NW1 6LY (GB)

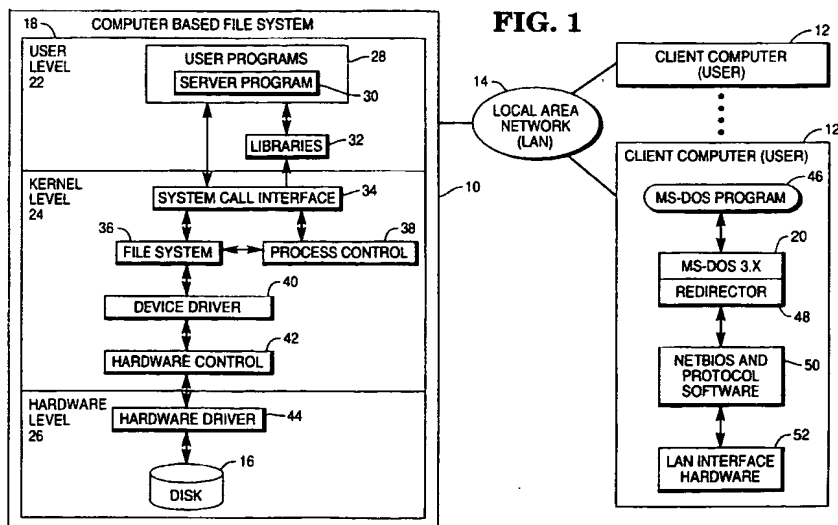
(71) Applicant: **NCR International, Inc.**
Dayton, Ohio 45479 (US)

(72) Inventors:
• **Bauer, Eric**
Freehold, NJ 07728 (US)

(54) Method of operating a computer network

(57) In a method and apparatus for binding network identities to locally-meaningful identities in a computer network, a client computer (12) is connected to a server computer (10) that performs various functions requested by an operator of the client computer (12). The server computer (10) assigns a temporary locally-meaningful identity to the operator of the client computer (12), and receives and responds to requests to perform functions from the client computer (12). The server computer (10)

triggers an ownership fault condition in response to a particular request received from the client computer. In response to the ownership fault condition, the server computer (10) assigns a permanent local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the client computer (12), depending on its security policy. The permanent local identity may be retrieved from a pool of previously allocated locally-meaningful identities maintained by the server computer, or the permanent local identity may be created as needed.



EP 0 689 326 A3



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 95 30 4261

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
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Y	* column 5, line 36-58 - column 7, line 7 * * column 8, line 55 - column 9, line 14 * * figures 2-6 *	6	
Y	EP 0 579 368 A (INT COMPUTERS LTD) 19 January 1994 (1994-01-19) * column 5, line 41 - column 8, line 42; figures 1-4 *	6	
Y	KAISERSWERTH M: "VERTEILTE DATEISYSTEME UNTER UNIX: EINE GEGENUEBERSTELLUNG VERSCHIEDENER LOESUNGEN. DISTRIBUTED FILE SYSTEMS FOR UNIX: A COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS" INFORMATIONSTECHNIK IT,DE,OLDENBOURG VERLAG. MUNCHEN, vol. 29, no. 6, 1987, pages 390-398, XP000715974	6	
A	* page 494, left-hand column, line 22 - page 494, left-hand column, line 55 *	1-5,7,8	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search MUNICH		Date of completion of the search 29 June 2001	Examiner Körbler, G
<p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			

EPO FORM 1503 03/82 (P04C01)



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 95 30 4261

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
Place of search MUNICH		Date of completion of the search 29 June 2001	Examiner Körbler, G
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EPO FORM 1503 03/82 (P4/C01)

ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.

EP 95 30 4261

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EPC FORM P0489

For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82



12 **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

21 Application number : **95304261.1**

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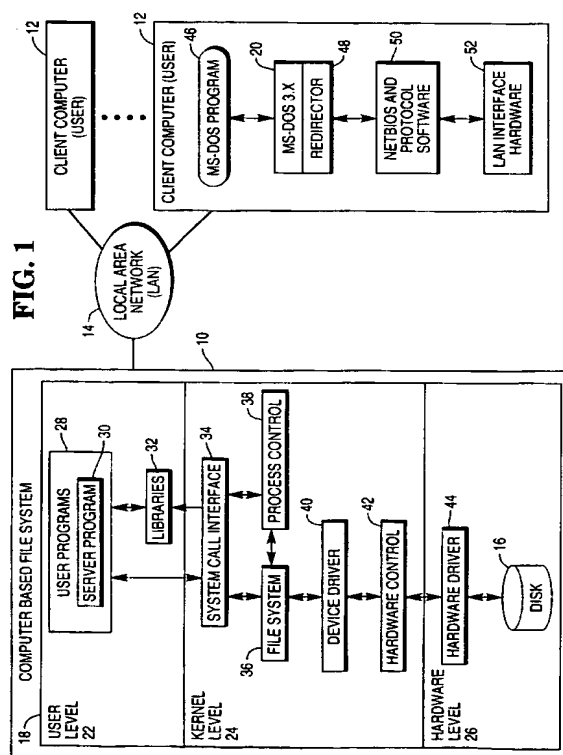
71 Applicant : **AT & T GLOBAL INFORMATION SOLUTIONS INTERNATIONAL INC.**
1700 South Patterson Boulevard
Dayton, Ohio 45479 (US)

72 Inventor : **Bauer, Eric**
167 Overbrook Drive
Freehold, NJ 07728 (US)
Inventor : **Schaffer, Russel W.**
97 Main Avenue,
Apt. Nr. 2
Ocean Grove, NJ 07756 (US)

74 Representative : **Robinson, Robert George**
International Patent Department,
AT&T GIS Limited,
915 High Road,
North Finchley
London N12 8QJ (GB)

54 **Method of operating a computer network**

57 In a method and apparatus for binding network identities to locally-meaningful identities in a computer network, a client computer (12) is connected to a server computer (10) that performs various functions requested by an operator of the client computer (12). The server computer (10) assigns a temporary locally-meaningful identity to the operator of the client computer (12), and receives and responds to requests to perform functions from the client computer (12). The server computer (10) triggers an ownership fault condition in response to a particular request received from the client computer. In response to the ownership fault condition, the server computer (10) assigns a permanent local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the client computer (12), depending on its security policy. The permanent local identity may be retrieved from a pool of previously allocated locally-meaningful identities maintained by the server computer, or the permanent local identity may be created as needed.



This invention relates to a method for operating a computer network, and to apparatus for carrying out such a method.

Local area networks (LANs) allow personal computers (PCs) to share resources typically located at a host computer, such as files and printers. These types of networks are generally referred to as client/server networks, wherein the PCs are considered "clients" whose requests are processed by the host "server".

Network operating systems are increasingly making use of "network-wide" user identities in which a "network user", such as John Smith, is given a single network-wide identity that can be used to uniquely identify that user anywhere in the network. Network-wide user identities simplify administrative and other tasks by permitting a single network-wide "name" to be used to identify a particular user regardless of network topology or organization. However, server computers typically require a separate locally-meaningful user identity or account to track ownership and usage of resources local to the server computer. For example, UNIX systems use the locally-meaningful integer "User Identifier" or simply "uid" to track ownership of files, directories and processes.

Because the set of valid "network users" can be vastly larger than the number of individual users that can be adequately supported on a particular server computer, it is impractical to create a locally-meaningful identity for every network user on each and every server on the network. For example, a university may have tens of thousands of students who are each distinct "network users", but creating tens of thousands of local user accounts on a number of different server computers is impractical on all but the largest computers.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of operating a computer network including a client computer and a server computer, wherein a user of the network may be automatically assigned a local identity at the server in an efficient manner.

Therefore, according to the present invention, there is provided a method of operating a computer network including a client computer and a server computer, characterized by controlling said server computer to perform the steps of: assigning a temporary local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the client computer; receiving and responding to requests from the client computer to perform functions; triggering an ownership fault condition in response to a particular request received from said client computer; and assigning a permanent local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the client computer in response to said ownership fault condition.

An advantage of a method according to the present invention is that it is suitable for managing network access to server computers, when the bulk of

such network access does not require the use of unique locally-meaningful identities. More specifically, the present invention allows a large population of network identities to be mapped to "guest" or temporary locally-meaningful identities on a server computer for normal access, and then assigning a permanent local identity to a network identity only when an "ownership fault" occurs. This technique avoids the impractical alternative of creating a locally-meaningful identity for every network user on each and every server on the network.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it provides a technique for assigning locally-meaningful identities or user accounts to network identities in a manner that eliminates the need for manual effort. As a result, the present invention can greatly simplify the efforts required of system administrators in managing network access to a server computer. Moreover, the owners of local resources, such as files, on a server computer can be readily identified.

One embodiment of the present invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 illustrates a typical client/server computer network architecture; and

Figure 2 is a flow chart illustrating the steps performed in the present invention.

Figure 1 is a block diagram of an illustrative client/server system or network in which the present invention may be utilized. The network includes a server computer 10 connected to a plurality of client workstations or personal computers (PCs) 12 via a local area network (LAN) 14. The server computer 10 provides the client PCs 12 shared access to data stored on hard disk 16.

In one illustrative arrangement, the server computer 10 may be an AT&T System 3450™ computer running under the control of the UNIX® System V Release 4.0 operating system 18. Each of the client PCs 12 may operate under the control of the well-known MS-DOS® operating system or OS/2® operating system 20. The LAN 14 may be the AT&T STARLAN™ system.

The client PCs 12 and server computer 10 may use the AT&T StarGROUP™ system software. This StarGROUP™ system software allows MS-DOS and OS/2 client PCs 12 to transparently share data files across the LAN 14. The server computer 10 can support one or more large hard disks 16 that can be made available to client PCs 12 on the LAN 14.

The UNIX operating system 18 controlling the operation of the server computer 10 is divided into three layers, including a user level 22, a kernel level 24, and a hardware level 26. The user level 22 includes user programs 28 such as a server program 30 and libraries 32 that interface to client PCs 12 via LAN 14 to enable access to the desired data stored in disk 16. The

kernel level 24 includes a system call interface 34, file system 36, process control subsystem 38, device driver 40, and hardware control 42, so that it interacts directly with the hardware level 26 providing common services to the user level 22 to insulate the user level 22 from hardware level 26 idiosyncrasies. The hardware level 26 includes a hardware device driver 44 and provides the operating system 20 with basic services needed by computer 10.

The system call interface 34 of the kernel level 24 represents the border between the user level 22 and the kernel level 24. The system call interface 34 converts user program calls into UNIX system calls. System calls look like ordinary function calls in C programs, and libraries 32 map these function calls to the primitives needed to enter the operating system in a well-known manner. The set of system calls includes those that interact with the process control subsystem 38 and those that interact with the file system 36.

Software 46 on the client PC 12 interacts with the server program 30 on the server computer 10 to allow access to the disk 16. Specifically, system calls by the software 46 that reference disk 16 are packaged into request messages by a redirector 48 and transmitted to the server program 30 by network software 50 and the LAN interface 52 over the LAN 14.

Figure 2 is a flow chart illustrating the steps performed in the present invention, wherein the interaction of the server 10 and the client PCs 12 from the perspective of the server 10.

Block 54 represents the server 10 receiving and responding to a Negotiate Server Message Block (SMB) from the client PC 12, wherein the server 10 determines the protocol dialect to use with the client PC 12. The SMB protocol is a well-known protocol used in many networking products. The Negotiate SMB is the first SMB sent on a newly established virtual circuit. In the response to the Negotiate SMB, the server 10 sends information to the client PC 12 indicating its capabilities. The final step in the negotiation occurs when the client PC 12 sends a Session Setup And X SMB.

Block 56 represents the server 10 receiving and responding to the Session Setup And X SMB to authenticate an incoming network identity from the client PC 12. The Session Setup And X SMB includes the user's network-wide user name and the name of the administrative network domain that they belong to. For example, the user name might be "JOHN-SMITH" and the domain name might be "ACCOUNTING." The server 10 consults its local mapping of network identities to locally-meaningful identities to retrieve the locally-meaningful identity to which the incoming network identity is mapped.

On a UNIX system, such a mapping might be implemented as a file that associates "username:domain" name pairs with locally-meaningful UNIX user accounts. For instance, "JOHNSMITH":"ACCOUNT-

ING" might map to the locally-meaningful "smith" identity. The well-known UNIX system file "/etc/profile" maps the locally-meaningful name "smith" to the appropriate numeric uid for that particular UNIX system.

If the incoming network identity does not have an explicitly assigned locally-meaningful identity, then the server 10 assigns the user a "guest" locally-meaningful identity. Assume for the remainder of this discussion that the incoming network identity does not map explicitly to any locally-meaningful identity and that it has thus been assigned a "guest" locally-meaningful identity.

Block 58 represents the server 10 receiving a command from the user that triggers an "ownership fault". Such commands may include, for example, creating a new file or directory, taking ownership of an existing file or directory, or other functions. For example, the command could be a Create And X SMB to create or open a file or a directory, wherein the action taken by server 10 is dependent on the name of the object being opened, whether the object already exists, whether the user is authorized to access the named object, and other factors, and a file handle is returned that can be used by subsequent service calls to manipulate the file itself or the data within the file.

Since a file stored on the server 10 must be owned by a valid local identity (e.g., a UNIX uid) and the user's network identity has been mapped to the "guest" locally-meaningful identity, i.e., a locally-meaningful identity that is not assigned to a unique user, the server 10 triggers an ownership fault. Upon triggering the ownership fault, decision block 60 represents the server 10 deciding whether or not to permit the network user to proceed to take ownership of the resources based upon the security policy established on the server 10. The security policy may dictate how to handle ownership faults based upon the organization or administrative domain that the user belongs to, what network-wide groups the user belongs to, or any other set of characteristics. If the user is denied permission to take ownership of the resource, then block 62 represents the request failing and the server 10 returning an appropriate error message to the client PC 12.

If permission is granted to take ownership of the resource, then block 64 represents the server 10 assigning a pre-existing local identity from a pool of previously allocated locally-meaningful identities to the user. The pool of previously allocated locally-meaningful identities would allow a quick assignment of locally-meaningful identities on the occurrence of an ownership fault. For example, a server 10 may continuously maintain a pool of 5 spare locally-meaningful identity user accounts, e.g., "newuser1" through "newuser5." The first time that an ownership fault is triggered and cleared by granting the user permission

to own the resource, then the server 10 assigns the "newuser1" local identity to the user. It is envisioned that the server 10 would thereafter create another "spare" locally-meaningful identity, e.g., "newuser6", so that the pool is maintained at an adequate level.

Alternatively, block 64 represents the server 10 creating a locally-meaningful identity for the user's network identity, for example, using the UNIX command "useradd". However, this technique would probably incur a real-time performance penalty, since the time to add a new local identity grows rapidly with the number of local identities assigned on some servers 10. Nevertheless, such a technique does not require using pre-existing accounts. Moreover, the local identity thus created may be more obviously related to the network identity than an arbitrary local identity, e.g., the network identity "ERICBAUER" may be mapped to a local identity of "ejb" rather than "newuser1".

Regardless of how the locally-meaningful identity is assigned, block 64 also represents the server 10 updating its records to show that, henceforth, this particular user's network identity will be mapped to the newly created and/or assigned locally-meaningful identity. For example, the server 10 may use the UNIX library 32 call "getpwent" to retrieve the UNIX user identity (uid) and UNIX group identity (gid) assigned to the newly created local identity, and then update the data in the local user-specific data records on the server 10 to reflect this new UNIX uid.

Block 66 represents the server 10 performing the requested command that caused the ownership fault. For example, the server 10 may complete its response to the Create And X SMB by creating the requested file and using the UNIX system call "chown" to set the ownership of this file to the correct UNIX uid associated with the locally-meaningful identity. At this point, the UNIX system call "stat" should indicate that the file created in block 66 is owned by the locally-meaningful identity that was assigned to the incoming network identity in block 64.

Block 68 represents the server 10 generating a status response for the requested command to the client PC 12 indicating whether the operation was successful.

For the duration of this connection between the client PC and server computer, no further ownership faults should occur, because the network identity of the operator of the client PC is permanently mapped to the unique locally-meaningful identity. Moreover, during subsequent sessions between the operator and the server 10, the network identity of the operator should be authenticated by the server 10, because of the persistent mapping between the network identity and the locally-meaningful identity maintained by the server 10. Thus, the network identity of the operator should never again be assigned the "guest" or temporary local identity when accessing the server 10.

Claims

1. A method of operating a computer network including a client computer (12) and a server computer (10), characterized by controlling said server computer to perform the steps of: assigning a temporary local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the client computer (12); receiving and responding to requests from the client computer (12) to perform functions; triggering an ownership fault condition in response to a particular request received from said client computer (12); and assigning a permanent local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the client computer in response to said ownership fault condition.
2. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that said assigning step includes the step of retrieving the permanent local identity from a pool of previously allocated locally-meaningful identities.
3. A method according to claim 2, characterized in that said assigning step further includes the step of creating additional permanent locally-meaningful identities, so that the pool of previously allocated locally-meaningful identities is maintained at an adequate level.
4. A method according to claim 1, characterized in that said assigning step includes the step of creating the permanent local identity when said ownership fault condition occurs.
5. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, characterized by the step of updating records in said server computer (10) to reflect the assignment of the permanent local identity by mapping the network identity to the permanent local identity.
6. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, characterized in that said particular request is selected from a group comprising a request to create a file, a request to create a directory, a request to take ownership of an existing file, a request to take ownership of an existing directory, a request to print a file, a request to control a print job, and a request to examine a print job's status.
7. A method according to claim 6, characterized by the step of determining whether to perform the particular request according to a characteristic associated with the network identity, and if said particular request is not to be performed, effecting the steps of denying the particular request

and responding to the particular request by transmitting an appropriate error message to the client computer (12).

8. A computer network for carrying out a method according to any one of the preceding claims, including a first computer (12) and a second computer (10) coupled to the first computer (12) for performing functions requested by an operator of the first computer (12), characterized in that said second computer (10) includes: means for assigning a temporary local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the first computer; means for receiving and responding to requests from the first computer to perform functions; means for triggering an ownership fault condition in response to a particular request received from the first computer; and means for assigning a permanent local identity to the network identity associated with the operator of the first computer in response to the ownership fault condition.

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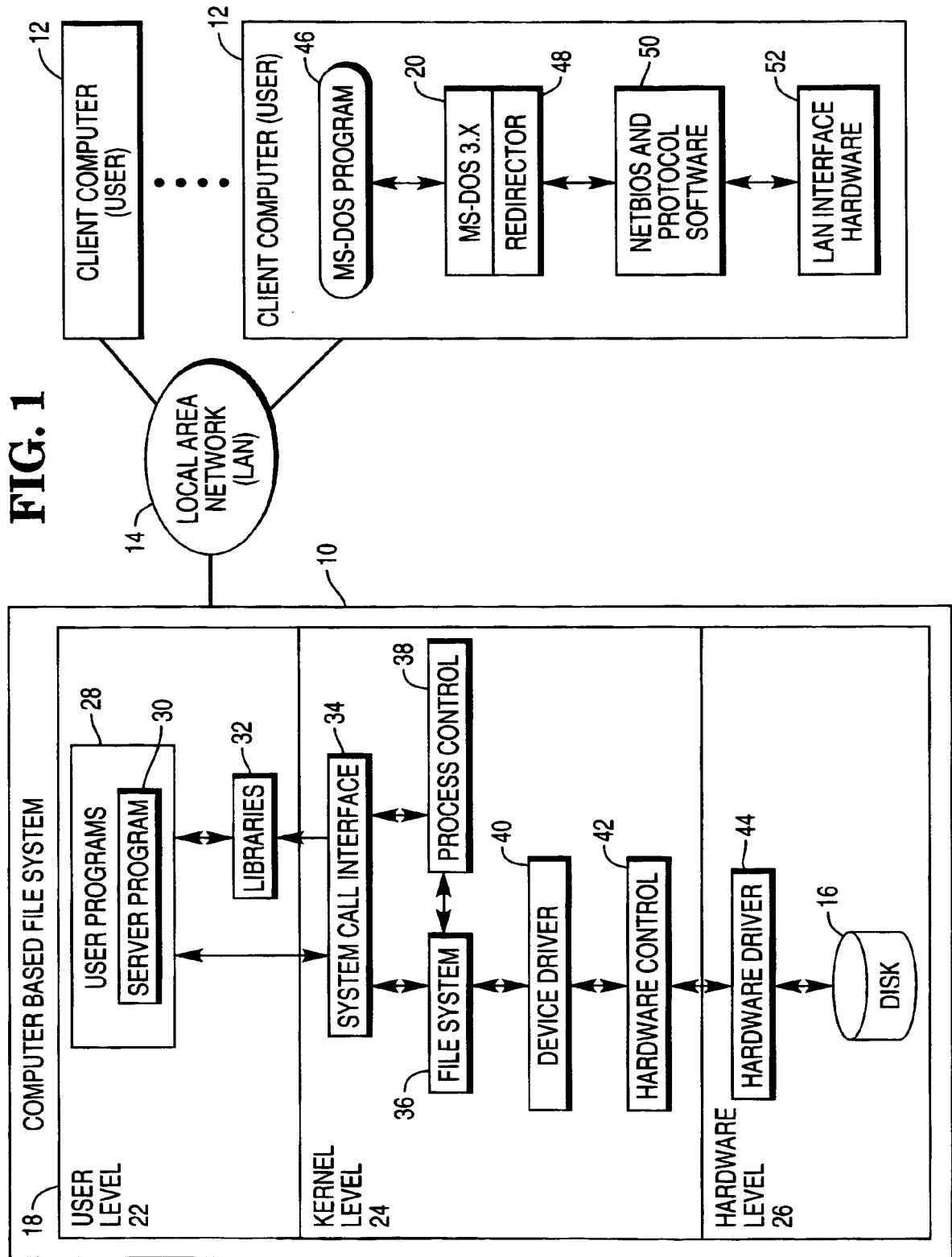
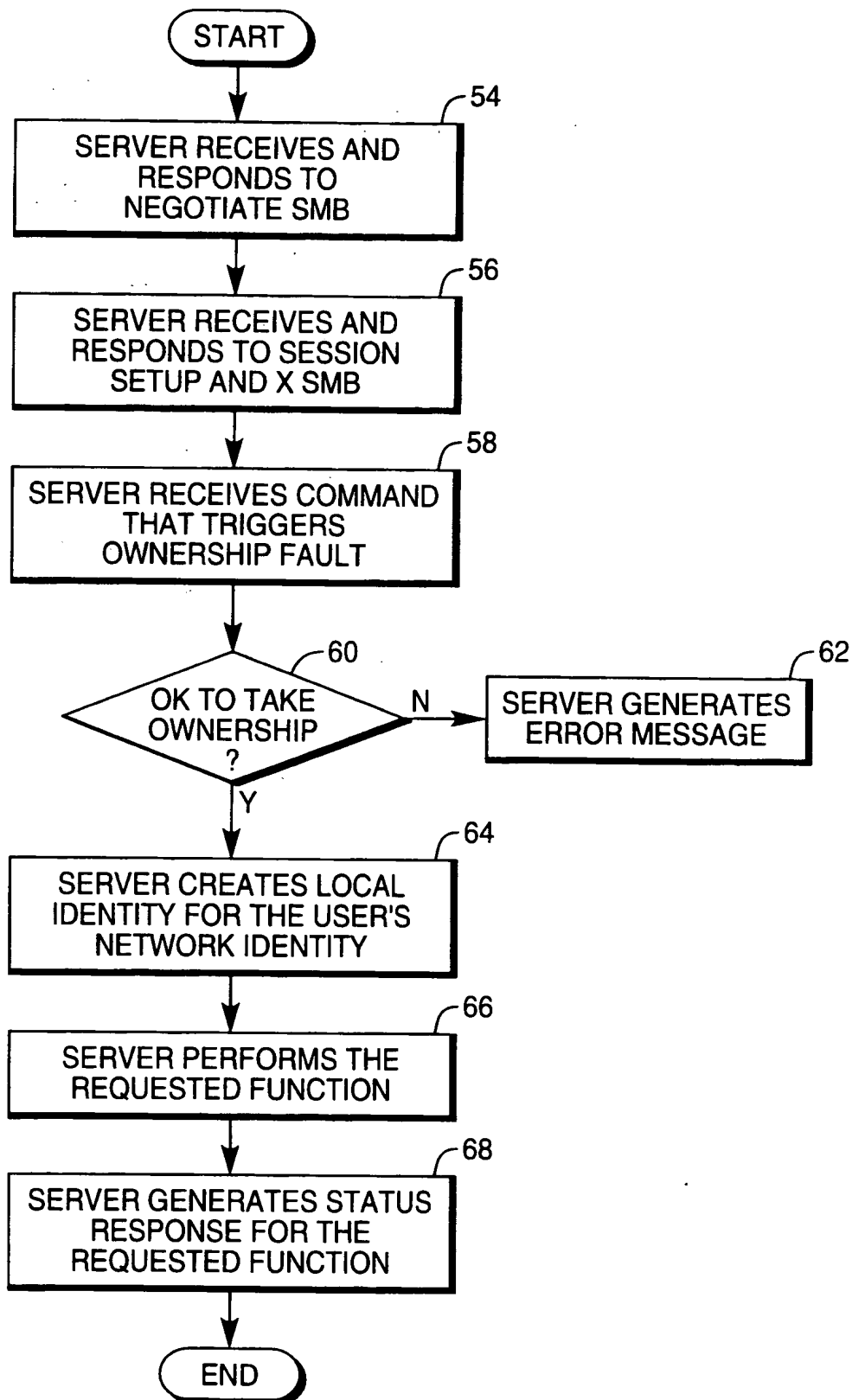


FIG. 2

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